DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 189 584 CS 005 568

AUTHOR Jackson, James E.: Sui-Runyan, Yvonne Steinruck
TITLE The Ten Most Important Teaching Skills in Teaching Reading.
PUB DATE 1 Apr 80
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education: *Reading Instruction: *Reading Research: Reading Teachers: Student Teacher Relationship: *Teacher Attitudes: *Teacher Behavior: *Teacher Effectiveness: *Teaching Skills

ABSTRACT

A list of 28 general teaching skills was given to 74 elementary teachers, who were asked to select what they considered the ten most important skills for teaching elementary reading. Based on the frequency of responses, the most important teaching skills, in rank order, were the following: (1) using informal observations of student work for diagnosis: (2) motivating children to read: (3) creating an enthusiastic climate for reading: (4) building/expanding student language background: (5) asking questions at the literal, inferential, evaluation, and application levels: (6) building/expanding students' experiential backgrounds: (7) giving clear directions: (8) organizing the class for reading instruction: (9) individualizing reading instruction: and (10) showing students their reading strengths and weaknesses. When the 28 teaching skills were divided into four categories that were then rank ordered, it was determined that teachers considered skills for motivating students to be most important, followed by skills in evaluation, instructional practices, and material use. (RL)

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THE TEN MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING SKILLS IN TEACHING READING

James E. Jackson

Southern Illinois University-Carbondale

and

Yvonne Steinruck Sui-Runyan

Boulder Valley Schools

Boulder, Colorado

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Yvonne Steinruck
Sui-Runyan

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April 1, 1980

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THE TEN MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING SKILLS

IN TEACHING READING

In preparing individuals to teach in today's elementary school, two fundamental questions are often asked. First, does he/she have the necessary knowledge and/or skills to teach? Second, does he/she have the kind of personality conducive to working with and relating to elementary children. These two questions revitalize the age old question, "Are good teachers born or made?" While we offer no direct answer to the latter question, we are aware that whether they are born or made, teachers must know about certain skills and/or teaching attitudes, and they must be able to use these skills in teaching, while creating a good atmosphere for learning.

The importance of reading in today's world, makes reading teachers classic examples of individuals who must be knowledgeable of theories, research, procedures and material concerning reading and be able to apply that knowledge in such a manner so as to motivate children to read. Malmquist (1973) and Spache (1973) suggest that the teacher is the most important variable in reading instruction. Spache further contends that much of our research efforts have been spent on instructional methods. He writes that

> such research is pointless in that such comparative studies tend to ignore the fact that the dynamic practices of the teacher and the kinds of teacher-pupil interactions she/he promotes are the most important determinants of pupil's achievement.

Teacher effectiveness in teaching reading comprises a myriad of complex interactions, involving student-teacher, teacher-material, and

student-material. The extent to which teachers understand these interactions and their effects on teaching reading will have a strong affect on how well children read.

When preparing teachers, there is not much that can be done in an undergraduate methods course to change or shape the personalities of teachers. At best, instructors can set models or show model examples, list good teaching practices and discuss principles. On the other hand, the undergraduate methods courses should (usually do) offer much information relative to definitions, steps, methods, available materials, procedures and/or strategies in teaching reading. Silvaroli and Wheelock (1975) suggest that the intent in the training of teachers is actualized in Frank Smith's concept which defines "information as a reduction uncertainty." They ask that "when attempting to . . . train a teacher to teach reading, to what extent do we in Reading Education or Educational Psychology attempt to honestly reduce the learner's uncertainty."

The amount of uncertainties that many preservice teachers (undergraduate) are confronted with in methods courses, are double and tripled when they actually begin teaching. Few, if any, methods courses can prepare a teacher for the multiplicity of occurrences in the classroom (psycholgical/mental and social trauma of children, record keeping, planning, material selection, discipline problems, teachers, parents and administrators' attitude). While most of the above listing are on the job training exercises, an increase in information relative to each may be helpful. Perhaps the best way to obtain such relevant information is to ask the teachers.

A list of 28 general teaching skills were generated from methods books, teachers, and professors. While we were well aware of the fact that it is virtually impossible to list all skills and abilities needed to be an effective reading teacher, it is possible to reduce the uncertainties by maximizing the amount of relevant information presented to undergraduates (preservice teachers).

The list was given to 74 elementary teachers in selected schools in southern Illinois.

The purpose of this study was to determine the 10 most important teaching skills as indicated by teacher selection. Using their experiences as a basis, teachers were asked to select what they perceived to be the 10 most important teaching skills needed to teach elementary reading. In addition, they were asked to rate each according to its importance.

Based on the frequency of response by elementary teachers, the most important teaching skills needed in teaching reading were:

Item

8. Motivating children to read.
13. Individualizing reading instruction.
2. Using informal observation of students' work and students in everyday class situations to diagnose and evaluate reading proficiency.
5. Giving clear directions.
6. Organizing class for instruction in reading.
25. Developing activities which build and expand the experiential background of children.
26. Developing activities which build and expand the language background of children.

27. Asking questions at the literal, inferential, evaluation, application level.

7. Creating an enthusiastic climate for reading.

19. Communicate with students their strengths and weaknesses (see list below).

When asked to rank the aforementioned skills, the teachers selected items 2, 8, 7, 26, 27, 25, 5, 4, 13 and 19 respectively (See the following list).

Teaching Skills

1. Ask open-ended questions.
2. Use informal observations of student work and students in everyday class situations to diagnose and evaluate reading proficiency.
3. Interpret formal test results.
4. Organize class for instruction in reading.
5. Give clear directions.
6. Create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
7. Create an enthusiastic climate for reading.
8. Motivate children to read.
9. Read stories aloud well.
10. Tell stories well.
11. Integrate the teaching of the language arts.
12. Integrate reading instruction in other subject areas.
13. Individualize reading instruction.
14. Use basal readers effectively.
15. Use children's literature (trade books) in the reading program.
16. Assess student interest areas.

17. Assess student interest in reading.

18. Communicate with parents both reader's strengths and weaknesses.

19. Communicate with the student his/her reading strengths and weaknesses.

20. Use the language experience approach in the reading program.

21. Teach phonics skills in isolation.

22. Develop record keeping forms and procedures.

23. Evaluate published instructional materials to teach reading.

24. Follow and use teacher manuals.

25. Develop activities which build and expand the experiential background of children.

26. Develop activities which build and expand the language background of children.

27. Ask questions at the literal, inferential, evaluative, applicative, and free-retelling levels.

28. Teach phonics skills as only a part of the total reading program.

All 28 items were then placed into four major categories: The categories were ranked according to the number of teachers selecting the item in light of all possible responses. For example, major category #1 had three items which yield 222 possible responses. One hundred thirty-nine teachers selected these items, thus denoting that approximately 63% of teachers selected these items. All other major categories were ranked accordingly. The frequency of response for the major categories were as follows:

Rank	Category	Items
1	Motivation	6, 7, 8
2	Evaluation	2, 3, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22
3	Instructional Practices	1, 4, 5, 27, 9, 10, 24, 20, 11, 12, 13, 21, 28, 25, 26
4	Material Use	23, 14, 15

The results of this study suggest that the teachers' skills or abilities to motivate children are major contributors to growth in reading. The selection/rank of those items relating to motivation, suggest that the most important teaching skills pertain to "Creating an enthusiastic, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom that will motivate children to read," Creating an atmosphere conducive for motivating children to read denotes the need for certain positive personality traits in teachers. The aforementioned statement is not intended to imply that children will only learn to read in enthusiastic, relaxed atmosphere. There are many children who will learn in spite of the atmosphere. However, to assure that all children have opportunities to learn to read in an environment conducive for maximum growth, good motivational devices such as positive attitude on the part of the teacher, assessing children's interest, using interest to change attitudes and freedom to read must be present.

The second major category selected was evaluation. The ranking of this category indicates that teachers understand the need to know their students' strengths and weaknesses before beginning to teach reading.

Among the seven items related to evaluation, the most frequently selected item pertained to informal observation of students' work and students in everyday classroom setting. The selection of this item (#2) as opposed to the use of standardized reading tests, concurs with the ideas postulated in major category number one, which was creating an atmosphere conducive for motivating child to read. The utilization of informal procedures allows teachers to evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses while maintaining a relaxed atmosphere.

The frequency to which teachers selected the last two major categories (instructional procedures and material use) offers additional evidence to the earlier mentioned study by Spache (1973). Results of this study suggest that teachers believe that the approaches and material used in teaching reading is secondary to creating environments for motivating children to read.

In conclusion, individuals responsible for preparing teachers to teach reading should attempt to make sure that such persons are cognizant of motivational devices, methods, techniques and/or procedures for creating a classroom atmosphere conducive for motivating and allowing children to read. A part of this environment requires that teachers are knowledgeable of the needs, elements and procedures for conducting informal evaluations of students' strengths and weaknesses. The approaches used and the material selected are of secondary importance.

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